

NEWS RELEASE



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[Note to editor: Dr. Katrina Hedberg, state epidemiologist, is available for interviews today, except between 10:15 a.m. and 12:15 p.m.]

Oregon teens smoking more hookah tobacco as new lounges open

Oregon Public Health Division study suggests teens view hookah as glamorous, not harmful

A new study indicates that hookah tobacco smoking among Oregon teen-agers is on the rise, due in part to a proliferation of hookah lounges that may be targeting young people with candy- and cocktail-flavored tobacco, online marketing and a party atmosphere.

Officials at the Oregon Public Health Division, which conducted the 2010 Indoor Clean Air Act Compliance Study in August and September, worry that the increasing popularity of hookah will reverse gains made during the last decade in the effort to reduce tobacco use among young people.

“The popularity of hookah smoking that we’ve seen among young people is putting us in a one-step-forward, two-steps-back situation in the battle against tobacco use,” said Katrina Hedberg, M.D., M.P.H., administrator and state epidemiologist in the state’s Office of Disease Prevention and Epidemiology.

“We believe teen-agers are turning their attention to hookah because they think it’s a glamorous and safe alternative to cigarettes. It’s not. Hookah could be creating a whole new culture of young people who get together to smoke tobacco,” Hedberg said.

Hookah tobacco – or shisha – is addictive, contains nicotine and can cause lung cancer, heart disease and other complications, just like cigarettes. Burning charcoal in the pipe creates additional risks, little is known about the health effects of smoking added flavorings.

Hookah pipes produce much more smoke than cigarettes. Hookah smoke contains dangerous levels of cancer-causing chemicals and toxic gases, such as carbon monoxide, posing a health hazard to smokers and lounge employees alike. The study found that the air in hookah lounges ranged from “unhealthy” at best to “hazardous” at worst on the Environmental Protection Agency’s Air Quality Index.

(cont.)

Oregon Public Health Division officials receive regular inquiries from people hoping to open hookah lounges under the smoke shop exemption. This points to a growing misperception that hookah lounges are exempt from Oregon’s Smokefree Workplace Law. In fact, they are using a “smoke shop” exemption in the law that allows smoking in tobacco retail stores. When legislators created the exemption, they specifically said they did not want to create smoking clubs, Hedberg said.

The Smokefree Workplace Law has been effective in Oregon, protecting nearly 100 percent of workers from deadly secondhand smoke exposure on the job. But hookah lounge employees – many of them young people who may have misperceptions about the risks – are being exposed to hazardous levels of smoke on the job.

Hookah lounges are required by law to prohibit access by minors younger than 18, but youth interviews and observational studies by Oregon Public Health Division officials indicate minors have little trouble gaining entry. In addition, many coffee shops and restaurants feature hookah smoking on their patios, and hookahs are increasingly available for purchase. Youth in the study said hookahs are a common fixture at parties and friends’ homes.

“Hookah lounges promote a social norm that smoking is cool and safe,” said Tom Parker, communications director for Oregon Partnership, a statewide nonprofit promoting drug and alcohol awareness, drug prevention and crisis lines for treatment referrals and suicide intervention. “They’re a training ground for going to bars, drinking and illicit drug use.”

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Additional resources for information:

- Colleen Hermann-Franzen, American Lung Association in Oregon: 503-718-6145, colleen@lungoregon.org
- Brett Hamilton, Tobacco-Free Coalition of Oregon: 503-740-0820, brett.w.hamilton@gmail.com
- Tom Parker, Oregon Partnership: 971-244-1375, tparker@orpartnership.org

Glossary of terms:

- “Certified cigar bar” means a business that has applied for and been granted an exemption from the Oregon Smokefree Workplace Law because it met the cigar bar certification criteria.
- “Certified smoke shop” means a business that has applied for and been granted an exemption from the Oregon Smokefree Workplace Law because it met the smoke shop certification criteria.
- “Hookah lounge” means a certified smoke shop that operates a hookah lounge. It also includes noncertified hookah lounges.
- The Oregon Smokefree Workplace Law and the Oregon Indoor Clean Air Act are synonymous. The Smokefree Workplace Law is the common description; the Indoor Clean Air Act is the name of the law.

The Oregon Tobacco Prevention and Education Program works with local health departments, tribes, schools and community organizations to deliver a comprehensive tobacco prevention program to all Oregon residents. These program activities are based on evidence-based strategies to reduce and prevent tobacco use.

For more information, visit www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/tobacco/.

For complete statistics on Oregon tobacco use and effects, go to www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/tobacco/docs/facts09.pdf.

Complaints about possible violations of the Smokefree Workplace Law can be submitted by calling 1-866-621-6107 or by going to www.healthoregon.org/smokefree.